

A Drop in the Bucket

Chairman Beagle, Ranking Member Williams, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Finance Workforce Subcommittee.

Good Morning/Afternoon, my name is Susan Brown and I am here representing the Columbus District of the Ohio CSEA Directors' Association. Like Kim, I've been a Child Support Program Director for 18 years and I'm also the Supreme Court Appointee Commissioner on the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood. I represent the judicial branch on the Commission. I attended a presentation last week featuring Patrick Kennedy and the challenges associated with people with mental illnesses who are involved in the criminal justice system. He said something that resonated with me. When he referred to the funding dedicated to the program he's championing, he used the phrase, "It's a drop in the bucket, but it's a step in the right direction." I think that describes the current resources being dedicated to helping small pockets of parents from the child support program enter the workforce. I'm here today to relate the incredible work that has been done within the program with scarce resources and how the additional investment of \$6.2 million to line 600502 would permit county agencies to expend an additional \$18 million a year and subsequently raise thousands of low income parents out of poverty and move them to supporting themselves and their children. While some of these numbers I am sharing may seem small, I want to remind you that prior to these program interventions, these non-custodial parents were paying very little to nothing for the support of their children and were also not able to care for themselves.

At Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency we've established Compass- a pilot project collaboration with the Domestic Court, FC Job and Family Services and the CSEA, which diverts parents from jail to work. The program utilizes individualized case management to help parents who owe child support gain access to resources for employment, parenting skills, financial literacy, and any other needs they may have. One father enrolled in the program in February of this year. He was a struggling Veteran behind on his payments and he sat down with one of our support officers and laid out the many needs he was facing. The Support Officer referred him to Goodwill's

Workforce Readiness and Financial Literacy classes and ensured he was connected to resources specifically designed for veterans. Within two months of joining Compass, he was hired at Prescription Hope Inc.- a company that navigates patient assistance programs for people who cannot afford their prescription medications-and has been self-sustaining and consistently paying on his child support order. As a result of simply taking the time to get know a parent's individual needs, there is one less jobless Veteran and one more family receiving much needed support payments.

A mother who went through Compass had been unemployed for six (6) years with no payments on her order during that time. After meeting with a support officer and completing a needs assessment, she was referred to Jewish Family Services. Again, within two months, we got a call reporting an employer and her first payment in six years was applied to her case. Payments have been coming in regularly and just last month we learned this mother had earned a promotion at her job. Of our Agency's Compass cases, 48 are now paying-resulting in a 36% increase in payments received.

The success of individualized case management is not just in Franklin County. Wayne County CSEA along with several of their community partners received a small grant to target custodial and non-custodial parents to help them become empowered through their own financial stability through personalized case management and a series of financial management classes. For this program, child support payments increased 62% in three months after the financial classes and 48% after six months of completion. One non-custodial parent in the program reported he was able to work with the CSEA staff and apply what he learned from the classes to the point where he was able to pay his BMV fees, obtain a driver's license, purchase a car, and started working for a transportation company. Prior to his enrollment in the program, this father was regularly non-compliant and resisted any kind of relationship with Wayne County CSEA. He has since paid on a regular basis and has even worked towards gaining custody of his son.

Stark County CSEA applied for and is now implementing a federal grant project called the Right Path Program. The program helps unemployed non-custodial parents

overcome barriers to employment, obtain a job, and develop meaningful relationships with their children. One father in their program worked diligently job searching through classes and meeting with his job developer on a weekly basis. Before joining the Right Path program, he hadn't made a support payment in over a year. This man was hired by a home health care company and was quickly promoted Office Manager; but that's not what he reports the biggest success was from his participation in the program. Through working with the CSEA staff, he learned the skills to better his relationship with the mother of his children and finally feels like his children can see that he is a good person.

The Fact Program is collaboration between Allen County CSEA, Coleman Professional Services, and the Allen County JFS Workforce Agency. The program serves obligors with felonies and requires them to attend fatherhood classes; drug, alcohol, and mental health counseling; GED classes; and intensive workforce training. Of the 48 participants involved in the Fact Program since 2014, 17 are employed and \$43,104.34 in child support has been collected from program participants. Allen County made the effort to find out what would help obligors with felonies become economically stable and as a result, the entire family unit benefited as well as the state of Ohio.

In Lucas County, the CSEA instituted the TANF Employment Referral Program (TERP) for non-custodial parents who are in default of their support order and lack employment. A separate case load has been designated for this project with one case manager focused on contacting these parents, bringing them into the Agency, and explaining the resources available to them. So far, 109 parents have actively participated in TERP and \$10,803.99 has been collected as a result.

When I put out a call for success stories to share with you from around Ohio, I was inundated with responses of how individualized case management provided by child support agencies changed the lives of families. The stories I shared with you are, quite frankly, just a few drops in the bucket. Most of the programs I mentioned target families who are currently on or formerly received public assistance. Without additional resources it is very hard to have these types of conversations with clients when caseloads are near or even sometimes surpassing one thousand. We want to impress

upon you here today that we have been doing the right thing in our program by providing these services, however, we need to increase our impact; we want to help more families not just receive child support payments, but to become economically stable – and less reliant on public assistance services. The ripple effect of your investment could touch the lives of thousands of your constituents. We have the proof.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susan Brown, Esquire, Director Franklin County CSEA